

William Rockefeller Wipes a Town off the Map!

A story of absorbing interest, in which the annihilation of a community to serve the selfish ends of William Rockefeller, one of the leading directors in the Amalgamated Copper company, is told in Collier's Weekly. The story, which deals with much that has never before been touched upon in the newspapers, is told in graphic and attractive style. It is in part as follows: Butte Evening News.

To buy a wilderness and make a community of it is within the opportunity of any moneyed man. To buy a community and make a wilderness of it may well be beyond the powers of the greatest of millionaires. William G. Rockefeller, vice-president of the Standard Oil company, is making the experiment on the little hamlet of Brandon in the heart of the Adirondacks. By methods that are always within the law—or what his attorneys interpret as the law—he is patiently striving to dislodge the remnants of the populace that still hold root inside the circle of his great game preserve. All the land about them is his; he has bought it and paid for it thousands upon thousands of acres, more than two whole townships, comprising lakes, rivers, forest and mountains.

BRANDON MUST GO

Only Brandon stands in his way; household belongings and their large families, wandered forth to fell new acreage of woodland. Behind them remained a few of the older dwellers, too inert, perhaps, perhaps too obstinate, or possibly too long-rooted in habit, to be moved.

These conservatives sat and watched Rockefeller buy land all around them until they were completely inclosed. Most of it he bought from one Pat Ducey, who owned twenty-five thousand acres of timber land around and including Brandon when Rockefeller came to the mountains for the purpose of buying an estate there.

AS BY A BARBER

Ducey was a practical lumberman of the sort that is fast stripping the forest regions of the United States stark naked. He left no tree that could possibly be regarded as a log. There are whole sections about Brandon where the face of nature has been shaved as by a skillful barber.

Ducey's lumber mill practically created the town out of what had been the merest hamlet. When the last tree had fallen Ducey moved, and most of the population moved after him. He left the mill and the land only because he couldn't conveniently take them with him. The only commercial enterprises that survived him were the sportsman's hotel and the country store.

THE BUYING OF BAY POND

To Ducey came Rockefeller's agents. Would he sell his land? He would—at a price. Would he name the price? He would and did. According to rumor it was \$100,000. As an amendment the agent suggested half that amount, and the sale was eventually concluded on these terms.

Rockefeller built himself a superb country place on Bay Pond, one of the fairest little bodies of water in the Adirondacks, some four miles from Brandon. Other purchases followed until he owned all the land for miles around the town, including both banks of St. Regis river and its tributary streams.

GUESTS WILL GO

But Ducey couldn't sell the town of Brandon entire, because he didn't own it all. For instance, Harrison G. Baker owned the little summer hotel. Being in the center of a rich fishing and hunting country it was a paying enterprise. But to have a lot of summer and fall fishermen and gunners tramping over his property was no part of Rockefeller's program. He undertook to buy the hotel.

Baker named a pretty stiff price. Rockefeller's agent laughed at him. "Your hotel isn't worth anything now," said he. "You won't have any guests after this."

"Oh, I think they'll stand by me," said Baker, faling to see the point. Then they'll have to go a long way for their fun," retorted the agent. "They can't cross our property to get to the St. Regis river, and they couldn't fish in our stream if they could get there. We'll prosecute if they shoot in our woods. What are they going to do?"

In vain the hotel keeper protested that the river had been stocked at state expense, and that, as a stream used for years for floating lumber, it was public water.

"You'll have to prove it in every court, right up to the court of appeals," said the agent. "We'll fight you to a finish on that point."

HE HAD NO MONEY

Baker had no money to undertake an expensive legal campaign. He sold his hotel for \$5,000, went away and died shortly after. In Brandon one hears that he was "hounded to death by Rockefeller," but such is the local feeling in the matter that had Baker fallen overboard in mid-Atlantic or been butted to death by a pet goat, some way would be found to lay the responsibility at Rockefeller's door.

Then came a move which startled the inhabitants—the "letting in the jungle." Like a destructive horde of ants came the money-king's meal, and soon the little cluster of human remnants looked out upon the place where their neighbors had once lived to see only the swift-growing brush drawing its mask of warm and kindly green across swept ground and raw excavations. The making of a wilderness was in progress.

OLIVER LAMORA

Thus far the pursuance of the Rockefeller ambition was along legitimate lines. Now, however, it encountered the first serious obstacle in the person of Oliver Lamora. Lamora is a French-American; old, ignorant, poor, obstinate, and fearless. A veteran of the civil war, he has pension enough for a plain subsistence, which he ekes out with trout from the streams, partridge and deer from the forest, and berries from the mountainside. When Rockefeller forbade hunting and fishing around Brandon, old Lamora was bitter and outspoken against the edict. What did he care that Rockefeller had bought the land; he had always hunted and fished there, and no interfering millionaire could stop him! Such was his attitude.

HE LED A FIGHT

By general consent he became the mouthpiece and leader of the "Old Guard" who still stuck to Brandon. Little by little he saw the numbers of his companions dwindle. Fauche who kept the little grocery store, found his trade so waning that he sold out. Lamora's two cousins got jobs elsewhere and were glad to leave.

The family across the street departed and Rockefeller left the house standing for the purpose of putting in it Eugene Flanders, one of his "watchers," as the game keepers and forest guards are called. To Lamora's mind, Flanders was set there to spy upon him, but Lamora's views must be taken with a liberal allowance for bias. Probably had the old man been less defiant in his attitude from the first, the offer which was finally made would have come sooner. And right here it is well to note that Lamora is no yellow journal "hero" defending his home against the depredations of a heartless millionaire. He was willing to sell out if he could get his price. And he thought that Rockefeller with his vast wealth ought to pay roundly. So he asked \$1,500. Now Lamora's house is unusually large for Brandon, and is better built than the average, but I

very much doubt whether as a real estate proposition it is worth \$1,500. Whether it was worth that to Rockefeller to tear down was for the maker of wilderness to determine. The agent asked for two weeks in which to refer the matter. Lamora gave him three. That is the last he heard from the agent. But some weeks later one of the watchers, meeting him, told him that he'd better get out while he could sell his place for something or "they'd law him out," as Lamora quotes the warning. To the ill-paid woodsman of the Adirondacks, who have had or heard of experience with suits brought by absentee landlords, involving expensive defense, the law is not protection, therefore Brandon must go. Not in any spirit of vindictiveness has Mr. Rockefeller reached this determination, but because he wants the land upon which the population now lives for the deer and foxes, the partridges and the quail of his domain. To that end he has brought every measure in his vast power for several years, from damage suits for trespass in which sterile victory brought him six cents, to making the government of the United States, through the postoffice department his instrument of persecution. But the town is still on the map.

FOURTEEN FAMILIES

Five years ago Brandon boasted twelve hundred inhabitants. It had its church, its prosperous hotel, its flourishing school, and its busy mill. Today it can muster but fourteen families and as many more deserted houses. All the rest is scrub-grown space. The hotel is burned down, the mill is razed, the church stands empty, the two or three hundred dwellings have vanished. Enemies of Rockefeller name him bitterly as the agent of devastation.

NOT FOR THAT MONEY

"He don get it for no fifteen hundred dollar now, Ole Rockefeller don," said Lamora to me, in his quaintly accented English. "He pay me five thousand dollar now if he want it."

Legitimate methods failing to oust Lamora, Rockefeller now resorted to measures not so clearly defensible. In March, 1902, he caused the old man's arrest for fishing in a branch of the St. Regis river, which the millionaire claims to own. His lawyer, who is also his partner in several land enterprises, withdrew the case, after two adjournments made at his own request, and brought civil action in a distant part of the country for \$55 damages with costs, charging violation of the Private Park law. The withdrawn case had already cost Lamora some money, and now he was hard up to it to appear in the distant court, but his neighbors, ill-off as they were, contributed toward his expense, and the firm of Willard & Leslie Saunders, of Dickinson Centre, volunteered to undertake his defense.

SOME COURT PROCEDURE

Afterward "Rockerism" was the principle issue in a very lively, though unsuccessful, political campaign which they conducted. The defense was that, as the waters on Rockefeller's property had been stocked by the state at public expense, he could not establish private park rights and could claim only actual damages. Lamora won. On carrying the case to the court Rockefeller was nonsuited. He went to the Appellate division of the supreme court, which ordered a new trial. The ground was traversed again exactly as before; the jury finding no cause of action, the county court nonsuited Rockefeller, and the appellate division, invoked a second time, again ordering a new trial. This was held last December, and the judge, on the ground that he was compelled to do so by the two opinions already handed down from the appellate division, directed the jury to find in

favor of the plaintiff for a sum not to exceed \$25 for each of the three offenses. The jury brought in a verdict for 18 cents damages—six cents for each trespass—and costs. From this sentence Lamora is now appealing. Meantime a temporary injunction had been obtained, cutting off Lamora's fishing, which he had been steadily prosecuting. On a motion to make the injunction permanent, both sides agreed to await a final decision in the Private Park case.

This is not all. The Standard Oil magnate had also brought suit against Lamora under the common law for \$75 for trespass. He got six cents. This was followed by another suit, this time for exemplary damages, which was soon withdrawn. Rockefeller has been making legal action pretty expensive in time, money, and worry for the obstinate fisherman.

The campaign against Brandon now began to broaden. Signs warning off trespassers were put up on all sides of the roads leading out from the town. Many of these are highroads, but the Rockefeller attorneys assume that they are private property. "Let the other fellows prove that they are highways," say the lawyers.

Old trails were closed, and barred against the passage of the Brandonites. Residents of the little settlement, who had obtained employment in a lumber company controlled by William Rockefeller, were discharged at the behest of the Bay Pond estate watchers. The word went forth that no Brandon man could get a job in that country. Children going out from the hamlet to pick berries on the mountainsides were driven home by the watchers and threatened with harm if they repeated the offense. Undeniably the berries belonged to Rockefeller, but in view of the fact that they were never marketed, and that ninety-nine per cent of them were left to wither on the bushes, the inhibition is regarded by those most concerned as harsh, though legal enough.

But the Rockefeller employes have not always kept within the law, and herein, presumably, they have gone beyond their instructions. A Brandon man named Barcomb, while fishing in the St. Regis, had his pole shot in two by a watcher who is a crack marksman. At the same time he was struck by a rock, from the hand of the watcher's companion. Both assailants were arrested, but before the case came up for trial, Barcomb (without any procurement on the part of the Rockefeller influences, it is but fair to say) had gone to the poorhouse. Other charges of violence are made against the gamekeepers, but most of them lack substantiation.

Naturally, methods such as these made William Rockefeller unpopular but what followed was a sorer exasperation to the thinning population of Brandon.

ROCKEFELLER TAKES BRANDON'S POSTOFFICE AWAY

Since 1887 the little place has had a postoffice of its own. It was in the middle of the village, convenient for all, and the nearest available point, moreover, for several lumber camps in the vicinity. Late in April of last year William Rockefeller wrote a letter to Henry C. Payne, then postmaster general about the postoffice at Brandon. Persons who declare that they have seen this document quote from it this passage: "Heretofore you have granted us many favors. We have still one more to ask of you, that you remove the postoffice from Brandon to Bay Pond."

Mr. Payne is dead; suffice to say of him that he was a man peculiarly amenable to such influences as Mr. Rockefeller could bring to bear.

Instead of referring the matter to the fourth assistant postmaster general, Mr. Bristow (an official reputed to be disobliging in delicate matters of this sort) as is customary in the affairs of fourth class postoffices, Mr. Payne himself sent an inspector to investigate. Before the inspector's report came in, Mr. Payne, by what urgency it is impossible to state, took matters into his own hands and ordered the Brandon postoffice closed. The effects were removed to Bay Pond, a settlement exclusively made up of the Rockefeller menage, four miles distant in the heart of the estate. The personal request of a private citizen had sufficed to move a postoffice from a point where it was needed to a point where it wasn't. Bay Pond already had a postoffice of its own.

To the Brandon people this seemed an injustice. Some of them even went so far as to say the government had been influenced by Mr. Rockefeller's position and riches. They got up a petition for the return of their postoffice. Seventy-four people signed it; a number, by the way, considerably in excess of the Bay Pond population. The petition went to Washington and was pigeonholed. Brandon came to understand that it could tramp to Bay Pond for its mail, or it could go without. It tramped. And it tramped over roads lined with signs announcing that this was William Rockefeller's private park, and warning trespassers away under penalty of the law. That is, the United States was maintaining a postoffice to which Mr. Rockefeller might, if his claims were made good, deny access to any person distasteful to him. That he did not deny such access perhaps speaks well for his wisdom.

On the whole, the Rockefeller employes were not disobliging to the Brandon people in the matter of mail. The postmaster at Bay Pond even went beyond the requirements of his office, often sending mail down to Brandon by one or another of the railroad hands. But the rape of their postoffice rankled in the minds of the Brandon folk. One day last fall Oliver Lamora sent his son to Bay Pond after a newspaper which he expected. The son returned empty handed. Thereupon the old man shouldered his rifle and set out himself. At the postoffice he found William Rockefeller and Flanders, the watcher. Lamora declares with glee that Rockefeller immediately stepped behind his employe and maintained that strategical snafu through the proceedings. Not that there was any danger, says the old man, for he only brought the weapon to protect himself against Mr. Rockefeller's wild deer. Lamora demanded his paper. The postmaster instituted a search, found it in a corner where it had been mislaid, and delivered it with an apology.

Early last winter inquiries were set afoot in Washington by Collier's as to the reason for the removal of the Brandon postoffice. Fourth Assistant Postmaster General Bristow knew nothing of the case. He instituted a search and found the petition with the 74 names. An inspector was dispatched to Brandon. He reported and early in the year, on recommendation of Mr. Conrad, who had taken Bristow's place, the office was re-established. Just at present Brandon seems to be a little ahead in the game with Rockefeller.

William Rockefeller does not seem to be an object of personal hatred; as for instance, his neighbor, Orlando P. Dexter, who met so tragic and mysterious an end in 1903. Dexter was a millionaire owner who had not only prosecuted relentlessly, but prosecuted with all the powers of the law, those who attempted to maintain what they considered their rights against him. Openly announcing his intent to ruin certain

resident owners, he set about his ends through process of law by which he did not live to benefit. They found him dead on the road-way which he had made private, thereby compelling a neighboring lumberman to make a circuit so long that his timber became practically unmarketable; shot from ambush by a murderer who left no clew. William Rockefeller left his place the day after the murder and left in haste it is said. Since then, so Brandon people tell me, several bullets have been shot into the Rockefeller buildings during the owner's absence. Even if this be true, and it is denied, it might well be accidental in a region where there is much hunting with rifles which carry several miles. People there are in that neighborhood who would be glad to have Rockefeller believe himself in danger of Dexter's fate. But the Standard Oil millionaire, unless he should employ methods as ruthless as Dexter's (which he has not yet done), is not likely to arouse the quality of vindictiveness which speeds the assassin's bullet. Anyway, his own people, who seem devoted to his interests, are a constant safeguard.

When I visited Brandon I found among the natives of the locality no more radical a feeling in this matter than a half-decided determination to disregard the Rockefeller placards and the Rockefeller law. There is considerable unpermitted hunting in progress on the "Private Park." I have no doubt that the surrounding Brandonites get fresh fish occasionally without going beyond the two mile limit. On my way down the track from Bay Pond to Brandon I met a hunter with a rifle over his shoulder and asked him if he had seen anything. "Nary hide ner hoof," said he.

"Are you one of the watches?" I inquired.

"No, sir!" he replied with emphasis. "I belong here."

"Are you allowed to hunt on the Rockefeller preserve?"

"Well," he said slowly, "I've been down a couple o' miles—beyond his line. At the same time, if a buck should come jumpin' over yonder 'Private Park' sign and try to bite me on the ear, I wouldn't guarantee but what he might get hurt."

That I take it, is the feeling which will continue to exist in Brandon as long as the town withstands the maker, of wilderness.

Socialist News From State Headquarters.

Butte local has expelled Alderman Silas Wainwright for violation of Socialist principles.

Mother Jones will enter the state June 1st at Billings, and will make 21 dates in Montana; all locals desiring a lecture from Mother Jones will write the state secretary at once as dates are rapidly being filled.

D. Burgess of Washington will fill a few dates in Montana during June.

We want to make a few dates for J. H. Walsh in Cascade county, and desire to hear from Socialists on the Neihart branch concerning same. Dates should be made for Stockett, Sand Coulee, Belt and Neihart.

As soon as finances will permit, Ben F. Wilson will start a tour of the state; he ought to start in June. Let us hear from the locals concerning his tour.

About the last of July Ida Crouch Hazlett will enter the state by the Great Northern route from the east.

There is prospects of a few new locals being organized in the near future, and quite a number of locals have thrown off their lethargy, and are preparing for a good summer campaign. Let us hope that the locals will keep active, as there is lots of work to be done.

A political and economic crisis is

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